

Coroner ME Hassell  
Senior Coroner  
Inner North London  
St Pancras Coroner's Court  
Camley Street  
London  
N1C 4PP

29th November 2021

Dear Madam

This letter is sent in response to the Regulation 28: Prevention of Future Deaths report, regarding Father Alan Howard Foster Griffin, issued on 9th July 2021.

You will recall I wrote on 26th August 2021 to explain the process that the CSSA would follow to review this case and respond to your report, and you kindly agreed to an extension to 30th November 2021 to submit the CSSA's response.

We have reviewed a range of documentary evidence, held interviews with key persons, and are in the process of producing a report of our review. Our review will also take into account the findings of an internal review being undertaken by the Archdiocese of Westminster and those of an independent review commissioned by the Church of England.

At the outset, I must state that the CSSA shares the concerns you have raised and, as the newly established safeguarding regulator for Catholic dioceses and religious life groups in England and Wales, we are determined to do all we can to prevent similar situations from occurring in the future. I summarise below the action we have taken, or are intending to take, specifically to address your concerns.

### **Area of Concern 1: Professional Scrutiny of Allegations**

*The safeguarding team of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster did not exercise sufficient professional scrutiny of the allegations that came to them from the Anglican safeguarding team.*

### **Response of the CSSA**

#### National Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance

- a. Whilst national safeguarding policies and practice guidance are issued by the CSSA, these do not remove the need for safeguarding practitioners to exercise proper scrutiny and to apply professional

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judgement in responding to allegations or concerns that are raised. To support the training being developed the CSSA is producing professional development resources.

- b. To support reflection and critical thinking in intra-agency or inter-agency meetings, the CSSA is developing a template form to be used in casework meetings. The template will include all areas that need to be considered and addressed and will act as a prompt to safeguarding practitioners.
- c. The CSSA is updating its practice guidance on the management of allegations and concerns, to provide for situations where concerns are raised but the information cannot immediately be clarified or verified. The guidance will give a timescale within which the information must be clarified or verified, what action must be taken if this cannot be achieved (i.e., escalation to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee for consideration and decision as to next steps).

The practice guidance developed in each of these areas will be considered by the CSSA Board in December 2021 and February 2022 with a view to being issued to Church bodies by the end of March 2022.

### Training

The CSSA national training lead is developing a suite of training for those in leadership and management in safeguarding roles within Church bodies. Work has commenced and the training modules, which will include mandatory modules on reflection and professional curiosity and on the provision of support to those about whom allegations or concerns have been raised, and they will be rolled out over the course of 2022.

### **Area of Concern 2: Management of allegations and support for those against whom allegations have been made**

- *Father Griffin should have been provided with a note of the allegations promptly.*
- *The Catholic safeguarding team did not deal with the investigation into Father Griffin promptly. The delay was significant, and it was harmful.*
- *The Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster could have been more proactive than it was in ensuring that Father Griffin had maximum pastoral support.*

### **Response of the CSSA**

#### National Safeguarding Standards

On 27th October 2021, the CSSA launched its new national Safeguarding Standards, which can be viewed at: <https://www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk/national-safeguarding-standards/the-standards/> Standard 5 relates specifically to the management and support of those who are the subject of allegations and concerns, and requires church bodies to:

- Adhere to national policies and/or practice guidance that set out how a respondent is to be informed when an allegation has been made and supported thereafter;
- Be mindful of the impact on the wellbeing of the respondent and appoint a support person with the responsibility for listening to and addressing the pastoral needs of the respondent;

- Access suitably accredited professionals to deliver professional mental health and other appropriate support when required;
- Ensure that the respondent has access to suitable legal representation when subject to statutory/canonical investigation.

#### CSSA Audit Programme

The CSSA is preparing its audit programme for 2022, and the Diocese of Westminster will be audited during the year. Compliance with Standard 5 will be tested through robust audit processes. Where it is found that improvements need to be made, the CSSA will ensure that action plans are implemented, and progress will be monitored.

#### National Safeguarding Policy and Practice Guidance

There is considerable existing practice guidance on Church bodies' responsibilities towards clergy and religious against whom allegations have been made, including on conducting an initial meeting with an individual against whom allegations have been made. In view of this case, that guidance will be updated to emphasise the importance of promptly informing individuals of allegations made against them, of completing safeguarding investigations in a timely manner, and of ensuring that support needs are identified and met throughout.

#### Training

Training on Mental Health First Aid will be made available as part of the national training programme, to teach safeguarding personnel how to spot signs and symptoms of mental ill health and feel confident in guiding them to the appropriate support. This training will be part of the national training programme rolled out throughout 2022.

#### **Additional Areas of Concern and CSSA Actions**

During our review, we have identified some additional areas of concern relating to the outcome of inter-agency meetings and the supervision of casework. I set out below the actions we are taking to address these concerns.

#### Inter-agency working

The CSSA has consulted with the Church of England National Safeguarding Team and agreed that we will collaborate on creating and implementing an Information Sharing Agreement between the two denominations, and a process for escalation of concerns where matters cannot be resolved by the respective safeguarding teams.

#### Case supervision

There is already national practice guidance in relation to induction, supervision, and support. Currently, the requirement is for case management supervision to be undertaken regularly. The standard will be changed to monthly (pro-rata for non-full-time roles) as a minimum with the requirement for more frequently if there are obstacles or changes that require resolution.

### Casework oversight

Already in progress is the development of a formal Case Consultation Committee (CCC). This has always been part of the remit of the CSSA and the proposal for it is based on a recognition of the benefits that can result from accessing high quality advice when faced with unusually challenging cases. The CCC will enable the CSSA to provide a range of expert advice on complex cases and will represent a formal means by which advice and guidance can be provided to Church bodies who wish to seek it from the CSSA. The CCC will be made up of professionals with specific expertise who meet to review a case and offer recommendations as to how it should be managed.

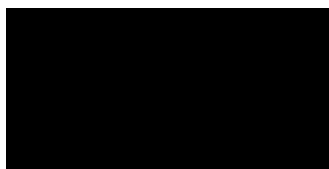
The CCC will create a record of the advice which will be provided to the referring body along with details of the assessment of the case and the recommendations for future management. The CCC may agree a date to review progress in the case if this is considered necessary.

### Learning lessons

Once our review is completed, the CSSA will arrange events to share learning across the Church bodies.

I hope this response demonstrates the seriousness with which the CSSA has taken your report, and importance that we place on supporting safeguarding practice improvements to ensure that allegations and concerns are subjected to proper scrutiny, safeguarding investigations are conducted promptly and professionally; and that appropriate support is put in place for those who are the subject of allegations to prevent future deaths.

Yours sincerely



Chair

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